

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-14

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S E C R E T SANTIAGO 138

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, CI
SUBJECT: LEIGH CONTINUES REARGUARD ACTION

REF: SANTIAGO 0100

1. SUMMARY: AFTER THE FORMAL PRESS CONFERENCE REPORTED REFTEL, LEIGH HELD BACK SIX REPORTERS. HE IS SAID TO HAVE TOLD THEM THAT PINOCHET WANTS TO BECOME AN ALL-POWERFUL DICTATOR AND WILL CRACK DOWN HARD ON ALL DISSENT. THIS TOUGH LINE WILL FURTHER ISOLATE CHILE INTERNATIONALLY, LEAD TO PINOCHET'S OUSTER AND THE ASSUMPTION OF AN INCOMPETENT ARMY GENERAL. HE SAYS THE CIA IS BACKING THE HARD LINERS AS THE SUREST COURSE TO PROVOKE PINOCHET'S DOWNFALL. LEIGH'S CONTINUED SNIPING REVEALS THE STILL SORE DIVISION WITHIN THE JUNTA. LEIGH'S POSITION WOULD SEEM TO BE INCREASINGLY UNTENABLE, BUT WE ARE NOT SURE WHAT GAME PLAN HE IS FOLLOWING. END SUMMARY.

2. ACTING PAO WEEKS OBTAINED FROM SEVERAL MEDIA PEOPLE THE FOLLOWING REPORT OF GENERAL LEIGH'S OFF-THE-RECORD COMMENTS. NONE OF OUR SOURCES WAS PRESENT AT THE MEETING BUT THEY INDEPENDENTLY GAVE US VERY SIMILAR ACCOUNTS OF THE SESSION.

3. LEIGH ASKED SIX TRUSTED (SIC) REPORTERS TO STAY BEHIND AFTER HIS PRESS CONFERENCE JANUARY 5 (REFTEL). AS WE REPORTED, LEIGH'S
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PUBLIC STATEMENTS SHOWED HIM EATING CONSIDERABLE CROW WHILE STILL TRYING TO SAVE SOME FACE.

4. IN THE PRIVATE SESSION LEIGH REPORTEDLY MADE THESE OBSERVATIONS:
-- PINOCHET WANTS TO BECOME AN OMNIPOTENT DICTATOR;
-- THE AIR FORCE THINKS HE IS PLANNING TO PURGE AND SUBJUGATE THE JUDICIARY AND THAT HE WILL CRACK DOWN ON OPPOSITION LEADERS;

-- PINOCHET'S HARD LINE WILL FURTHER ALIENATE CHILE'S FRIENDS
AT A TIME WHEN PROBLEMS WITH ARGENTINA ARE VERY SERIOUS AND CHILE
HAS MOBILIZED TROOPS IN THE SOUTH;
-- THE COMBINATION OF FOREGOING FACTORS MAY TOPPLE PINOCHET,
WHO WOULD BE REPLACED BY ANOTHER ARMY MAN LACKING EVEN PINOCHET'S
ABILITY;
-- THE CIA WANTS THE GOC TO FALL, MAY HAVE INFILTRATED PINOCHET'S

INNER CIRCLE AND IS PRESSING THE HARD LINE AS THE BEST WAY TO DROP
HIM;
-- THUS THE ARMED FORCES HAVE THE DUTY OF PREVENTING PINOCHET
FROM CONSOLIDATING HIS POWER.

5. COMMENT: BY AND LARGE THESE ARE THEMES THAT LEIGH HAS BEEN
DEVELOPING OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS (EXCEPT FOR THE CIA FILLIP)
BUT NEVER HAVE THEY COME ACROSS SO VIVIDLY. THE SELECT AUDIENCE
LEIGH USED ENSURED THAT THE WORD WOULD GET OUT.

6. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, LEIGH FINDS HIMSELF IN A VERY UNCOMFORTABLE
POSITION. CONTINUED CARPING ALONG THESE LINES CAN ONLY MAKE
HIS SITUATION TRICKIER. LEIGH MUST BE FAIRLY CONFIDENT OF THE
SUPPORT FROM HIS INSTITUTION. HE HAS CERTAINLY MADE CLEAR THAT
DIVISION WITHIN THE JUNTA HAS NOT HEALED.
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